

Body, Illness and Symbol in Ernst Cassirer

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The aim of this paper is to study Cassirer's philosophy of the body, and some of its foundations developed in the report entitled "Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness." It details how patients with cerebral aphasia and apraxia are characterized by a loss of symbolization abilities in the performance of operational tasks, as well as in their linguistic performance, which translates into a decrease in the ability to create cultural meaning. These cases allow one to evaluate the definition of the human being as a "symbolic animal" that is presented in *An Essay on Man*. An interpretative reading of both works is proposed to underline the role of the body in the development of (a) the symbolic formation process and (b) cultural development.

Keywords: body – aphasia – apraxia – symbol – Cassirer

Introduction

The philosophy of the body developed by Ernst Cassirer was built throughout the author's life, being an essential aspect of his famous *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The central idea of his approach proposes to understand the human being from its organic form and to recognize in the functioning of biological structure the reason for its humanity. According to the author, every human being is a "symbolic animal" (Cassirer 2006, 31) who lives and interacts with symbols, such as myth, language, art, science, etc.

However, we can find a report developed from medical incursions between 1927 and 1929, in which Cassirer studies some pathological conditions where he details how patients with brain lesions in the frontal and temporal lobe are not able to develop some linguistic behaviors (disabilities such as lack of language comprehension, difficulty to pronounce words due to muscular paralysis, difficulty to speak, among others, depending on the area that is damaged). The conclusions reached by Cassirer are very specific and contributed to the understanding of the relationships between language and action in the construction of number, space, and time, but specifically he states:

“A person with aphasia or apraxia seems to have been thrust one step backward along this path that humanity had to open up by a slow, steady endeavor. Everything that is purely mediated has in some way become unintelligible to him” (Cassirer 2021c, 316). This being so, what does it mean, in the phenomenological project described by the author, that some human beings are incapable of symbolizing? How can this condition be linked with the definition of the human being as “animal symbolicum”?

In this article I will show two issues: first, that aphasia and apraxia, despite impeding the development of linguistic skills and, therefore, the ability to symbolize, do not imply the loss of an essential note or characteristic of human beings, since their cultural performance depends on an interrelation between various symbolic forms and not only language, thus highlighting the harmony and functional unity of symbols. Secondly, through the study of the pathology of symbolic consciousness, the author underlines the value of the anatomical structure in the development of culture, which manifests the integral unity between nature and spirit (Cassirer 2021c, 561 – 82).

The organization of the present article is as follows: in a second section the general terms of the definition proposed by Cassirer will be presented, to show both the theoretical references he considered and the role played by human anatomy in the development of symbols. The third section describes, following the author’s results and some recent medical results, how some cerebral lesions hinder the individual’s capacity to achieve the understanding of symbols. The fourth section deals with the importance of philosophy in the study of pathological disorders of language and behavior.

I. Animal Symbolicum: A New Definition of the Human Being

In *An Essay on Man* Cassirer elaborates a historical review of the different definitions of the human being. His conclusions establish that reason has been a constant key of valuation that has been assumed by the different anthropological perspectives throughout history. Furthermore, thanks to this a great amount of material has been reached to better study our being: “We appear, nevertheless, not yet have found a method for the mastery and organization of this material” (Cassirer 2006, 27). As a proposal to achieve this unity, he takes up the results of the biologist Jakob von Uexküll (Uexküll 1926, 126 – 177), which he summarizes as follows:

Every organism is, so to speak, a monadic being. It has a world of its own because it has an experience of its own. The phenomena that we find in the

life of a certain biological species are not transferable to any other species. The experiences—and therefore the realities—of two different organisms are incommensurable with one another: In the world of a fly, says Uexküll, we find only “fly things,” in the world of a sea urchin we find only “sea urchin things” (Cassirer 2006, 28).

With this simple basic idea, Cassirer develops a new definition of the human being as “animal symbolicum” (Cassirer 2006, 31). By relying on the anatomical differentiation between species, what the neo-Kantian offers is a revision of the possible functional circles of the anatomy of each animal. For him, following the biologist, the adaptive capacity of the life form reveals a complex network of organic and psychological relationships through which the central characteristic of the life-world of the species in question is appreciated. However, in the case of the human being, its anatomical and psychological vitality is not sufficient to express its essence, for throughout human history a new relational capacity and thus a unique mode of the human species, a symbolic adaptation to the environment, has been expressed (Cassirer 2006, 29 – 31).

Uexküll had studied the role of anatomical structure – mainly the task performed by different neuronal systems of each species – in the process of adaptation to the environment (Uexküll 1926, 270 – 362). According to this author, the distinction of reactive systems is due neither to the physical conditions in which the organism lives nor to the anatomical conditions of the individual, but to an interrelation of both. He mainly held three general ideas: (a) the inner world of an animal is corporeally linked with (b) the outer world to which the animal reacts creating (c) the world of action corresponding to the animal. This author states that every organism operates according to a particular plan that does not respond to universal laws – as in the case of physics – but follows biological laws that explain the differences between organisms.

Cassirer, for his part, supported by these results, will maintain that the human being lives in a vital world or “functional circle” proper to its species (Cassirer 2006, 32 – 48). Therefore, the consideration of the organic form of the individual translates into the only possible means of relation that the animal must adapt to its environment: “Consideration of the function-world of organisms showed that the animal-subject is not to be sought in an ego localized in the brain, but that the subject governs the entire framework of the animal body” (Uexküll 1926, 234). In the case of the human being, its bodily form can be understood as an organic expression of its functional circle, of its vital

environment, so that human corporeality is not understood through the biological responses that are generated in front of the surrounding environment, but operates according to a new function that allows the human being to recognize itself as a being linked to its environment, but without limiting itself to its organic functions.

According to the author, the human being knows the reality that surrounds it only through the symbols it develops. Although he recognizes the capacity of other species to act with complex actions, which can be considered as manifestations of their intelligence, it is only the human being who has been developed a symbolical universe. We can find a development of these ideas in the chapter entitled "From Animal Reaction to Human Responses" (Cassirer 2006, 32 – 47). Here, Cassirer offers a wide variety of examples where animals (mainly primates and dogs) perform complex actions that can be considered as "intelligent," but also details that "animals do not always react to stimuli in a direct way...they are capable of an indirect reaction" (Cassirer 2006, 32). For him, the central difference lies in the capacity of the human being to precisely symbolize actions. The central difference, therefore, does not lie in the complexity of the actions performed, but in the human capacity to integrate in the actions performed an additional meaning that the execution itself does not possess. Therefore, he considers that abilities such as language are exclusively human since their operation is not explained by the act of emitting phonetic sounds to react to pain, hunger, sleep or any other situation derived from the environment. But rather, in the case of human beings, in the use of language we find functions that do not correspond only to the mimetic repetition of sounds or to the analogical reproduction of sounds, but we find a symbolic dimension that allows the manifestation of a dimension of pure meaning (Cassirer 2006, 119 – 148).

Cassirer illustrates the importance of the process of symbolic apprehension by taking advantage of the biographical testimony of Hellen Keller to show how the set of objects with which her tutor made her experience the world (Keller 1954). In her autobiography, Keller tells how Miss Sullivan had tried to teach her the words "d-o-l-l" and "w-a-t-e-r" to refer to the real-world objects "doll" and "water" as spiritual correlates of those same hand signs. In the psychological detail described by herself, one appreciates the astonishing moment when the presence of the material world ceased to exist as mere

sensation and became an astonishing and decipherable reality.¹ The main result noticed in this testimony is the reflexive understanding of objects as spiritual entities whose meaning resides both in the materiality of the thing and in the vivid character of the world, since things, from the correlation between the gesture and the object, were no longer only potentially sensitive entities, but now acquired a name that determines a new relationship of interaction with reality (Cassirer 2006, 39 – 41).

As can be seen, the interest is to demonstrate how the organic life of the human being is linked to resources and abilities that allow him to interact with his reality, since the animal symbolicum is a living organism that responds and reacts to the demands of the environment, but whose interaction depends on a “functional circle” (Uexküll 2010, 79 – 91) which Cassirer will call: “symbolic system” (Cassirer 2006, 29).² From this thesis, the neo-Kantian will maintain that the set of intellectual resources with which human beings have been adapting are not only understood as natural evolutions, but as cultural development, with symbolic formations being the main resource of this symbolic system (Cassirer 2006, 48 – 69).

For Cassirer, following Uexküll (2010), “life is perfect everywhere; it is in the same in the smallest as in the largest circle” (Cassirer 2006, 28 – 29). This allows us to affirm that the qualitative difference towards which he points is found in what the neo-Kantian calls symbolic formation. Language, as we

¹ Hellen Keller’s testimony is quite illustrative in this regard: “We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time he swept away” (Keller 1954, 36).

² This terminological precision is not minor among scholars of both authors. According to research on Uexküll’s theory and Cassirer’s reading of it, authors such as Jui-Pi Chien (2006) consider that the Neo-Kantian’s interpretation contains more of a personal reading than the biological results shown by Uexküll. For his part, Carlo Brentari (2011) shows how biological theory, and above all, bio-semiotics, deeply influenced the anthropological theory of the philosopher from Breslau, which allows us to affirm that the proposition that the human being lives within a symbolic functional circle, really has a support in Uexküll’s theory, which constitutes a scientific reference of support and not only a speculative one on the part of Cassirer.

know, in his magnum opus appears as “symbol” together with myth and science, and then, towards the end of his life, he recognizes a greater wake of formations such as history, art, religion, and points to the possibility of new and varied formations. In this sense, one might ask, what is a symbolic formation and what role does language play in its development?

While each symbolic form is independent and develops within its own sphere, the general path traced by Cassirer locates the functional triad of expression, representation, and signification, as the driving axis of myth, language, and science, but highlighting linguistic and technical ability as the basic skills in the shaping of such symbols. Jean Lassègue’s work is especially relevant to the study and understanding of what he calls “semiotic Philosophy of Forms” (Lassègue 2020, 95 – 182). According to his reading, two results can be drawn: first, while each symbol is independent, the construction of each form historically depended on the linguistic capacity of human beings to understand the phenomena of the environment. This reading of Lassègue allows us to trace the evolution suggested by the neo-Kantian in his magnum opus, since in the volume dedicated to *Mythical thinking* it is detailed that myth, being a primordial form, could manifest itself in written, phonetic and pictorial forms (Cassirer 2021b). In the case of *Language*, its origin is located on the borders of myth, culminating in the construction of signs as the historical moment where analogy gives way to pure meaning (Cassirer 2021a). Finally, in *Phenomenology of Cognition*, when science is treated as a symbol, the role of language is recognized as a basic symbol that allows the constitution of arithmetical and algebraic signs until it gradually gives way to mathematics as a new universal language system (Cassirer 2021c). The second result highlights the instrumental side of the process of symbolic construction; each symbol not only develops within a linguistic development, but in a particular mode of production: myth, within a totemic-ritualistic system, language in the historical development of a grammar, while science emerges from the systematic development of an experimental and process. As we see, each symbol depends on both linguistic and technical foundations.

In this framework of ideas, it can be understood that an organic condition that prevents the free development of language and coordinated movements for the execution of tasks freely, was presented as an opposition to Cassirer’s general theory of symbolic formations, since those organic conditions translate into impediments for the symbolic execution of linguistic skills and voluntary actions.

II. Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness: A Philosophical Reading of Disease

One of the objectives of the second part of the *Phenomenology of Cognition* was to study the biological conditions through which the human being perceives the stimuli of the environment. To this end, the author had the opportunity to accompany Goldstein in various sessions of psychiatric intervention, as well as having the opportunity to interview several patients firsthand (Cassirer 2020, 243 – 328). Although it is evident, Cassirer's working approach is purely philosophical and as he himself details its purpose was to answer the question: "Can the pathological alterations in speech and in the related basic symbolic performances provide a clue as to what these performances signify for the construction and the total structure of culture?" (Cassirer 2020, 314).

Cassirer understood culture as the unity of human expressions and products over time developed, as mentioned, through technical and operational systems, both mythical, linguistic, and scientific, as well as resources of other symbols such as art, politics, economics, among others. To him, it was important to study how all these expressions and manifestations had been possible over time through what he himself called "critique of culture." (Cassirer 2021a, 9 – 10). The purpose was to study the functions of each activity independently, but also the general function that allowed the cultural unity of the diverse. One of the aims of *An Essay on Man* is precisely to offer a general balance of achievements by presenting the human being as the efficient agent of functions and symbols, so that a "philosophy of culture begins with the assumption that the world of human culture is not a mere aggregate of loose and detached facts. It seeks to understand these facts as a system, as an organic whole" (Cassirer 2006, 238).

In understanding each fact as an element of the system, it was important to study the role of pathological conditions of language and action. The answer we find in *Phenomenology of Cognition*, in the first instance, presents a detailed analysis of apraxia and the disease of aphasia to understand the general characteristics of this condition. According to Goldstein's results, apraxia is recognized as a pathology, but even so, each case must be approached from its own history since no disease is like another (Cassirer 2021c, 313 – 315). From a philosophical point of view, this thesis of Goldstein contributes to the general thesis developed by Cassirer that substantial knowledge of objects, and specifically of this disease, is not possible; instead, it is necessary to approach it from a functional point of view to determine its meaning, that is, to ask: what functions can a patient with aphasia or apraxia perform?

We can confront this asseveration with recent medical literature on aphasia, and we can find that, depending on the place where the brain lesion that causes language problems occurs, it generates speech difficulties related to the damaged brain area, which implies that there are subtypes of aphasia (conceptual, ideational, Buccofacial, Childhood, etc.), depending not only on a linguistic difficulty to express or understand sentences, but also for the execution of tasks associated with those same deficiencies in language comprehension. Specifically, Theodore Wasserman and Lori D. Wasserman argue: “Apraxia represents a disruption of a complex behavior, and as a result praxis depends on a complex, large-scale network of structures recruited collectively to accomplish the desired task” (Wasserman – Wasserman 2023, 46). They themselves recognize that it is not possible to determine that a specific area of the brain fulfills a correlative action behaviorally or linguistically, since neurons fulfill multiple functions; however, it is possible to associate brain areas with the development of tasks, so that in case of brain lesion in those fields, operational dysfunctions associated with those same neuronal regions occur:

A disruption anywhere in that system, cortical or subcortical, or anywhere in the variously recruited loops [frontal and parietal cortex, basal ganglia, and white matter tracts containing projections between these areas], has the potential to disrupt praxis and produce an apraxic condition” (Wasserman – Wasserman 2023, 56).

As we can see, aphasia and apraxia, deriving from a brain injury, must be understood as a complex neuronal dysfunction that generates difficulties in speech and behavior, but also in the capacity for affective control and regulation, as well as a decrease in the capacity for information processing, which translates into motor actions whose results are associated with cognitive and operative dysfunctions and incapacities. In this sense, when Cassirer establishes that these medical conditions make it possible to measure the distance between the organic world and the world of culture, he establishes that the patient’s activity is limited by brain lesions that prevent him from developing healthy neuronal functioning (Cassirer 2021c). This implies that those abilities proper to individuals with a healthy neural network maintain all their natural capacities intact, thus being able to function with the regular motor skills they have learned throughout their continuous interactions with the environment.

In this sense, Norbert Andersch considers that this model of Cassirer tries to study aphasia and apraxia, to understand how these pathological conditions

modified the patient's life and health (Andersch 2015, 171 – 176). The central objective of the neo-Kantian is to emphasize that the general principle of action of the patient is the development of operative habits that allow him to solve the most common daily tasks, incorporating, for this purpose, general schemes of solving typical problems within the patient's life, since the central objective is the development of a functional social life. However, Cassirer himself emphasizes that the philosophical reflection that can be extracted from the patient with aphasia and apraxia allows delimiting the loss of the symbolization functions so common in the human being, since the general effort to which medical and psychological intervention is oriented is to restore the patient's capacity for analogical and interpretative comprehension.

This model of interpretation was developed by Cassirer following the work methodology of the Polish physician Kurt Goldstein (Goldstein 1963). To Goldstein, instead of understanding a pathological condition as a disease that affected the patient, by understanding it as a specific brain lesion disfunction, he proposed to treat the disease as a condition that could be intervened from the totality of the human being. Although some of the capacities and abilities were impaired, this meant only the suffering of a disease that prevented the development of several important functions, but which do not determine the overall being.³ The doctor himself writes:

...it is obviously necessary for the physician to know the organism as a whole, the total personality of his patient, and the change which this organism as a whole has suffered through disease. The whole organism, the individual human being, becomes the center of interest (Goldstein 1963, 6).

These clarifications are important because they establish two different conceptions of what Cassirer calls pathology of symbolic consciousness. First, the suffering of neurological lesions that prevent the production of speech, translate into a proof of the importance of the symbol in the life of the human being. Second, Goldstein's work aims at medical intervention to improve the neurological and operative conditions of patients as a whole:

³ This work methodology postulated the importance of intervening the patient and favoring the development of skills from the framework of their general functions, in order to replace those skills lost due to some pathology, has as background the work of Goldstein (1963); however, with Cassirer (2020, 243 – 328) knew how to take advantage of this methodology of intervention in his well-known study on the pathology of symbolic consciousness to describe how the biological structure of the human being is a condition for the use of symbols.

The organism, we assume, is a unit. We shall consider the functioning of this unit by means of the facts gained through studies of the nervous system, because the functioning of this system lends itself especially well to explanation. The nervous system is an apparatus which always functions as a whole (Goldstein 1963, 11).⁴

With this we can reinterpret Cassirer's thesis when he maintains that for the aphasia or apraxia patient: "Everything that is purely mediated has in some way become unintelligible to him; everything that is not tangible, not directly existent, evades both his thinking and his will" (Cassirer 2021c, 316). The general sense of this study, therefore, intends a phenomenological description of the conditions of the disease, and in that sense, it details how neuronal atrophy translates into an impossibility to symbolize linguistically or operationally.

This prior clarification is important since it delimits the meaning and function that this statement fulfills within the framework of the study. It must be remembered that the purpose of *Phenomenology of Cognition* is the description and interpretation of the phases that the spirit fulfills for the constitution of meaning; specifically, the second part is interested in studying the psychological and physiological processes through which the subject apprehends and interprets the phenomena of the environment. Accordingly, "Phenomenology must be understood as a whole [and it] must be unfolded progressively by thought in its own independent movement and rhythm. This unfolding constitutes the being and the essence of science" (Cassirer 2021c, xxxiii – xxxiv).

The work of Sebastian Luft can help to deepen the value of this clarification, for, according to his reading, the purpose of Cassirer's phenomenology is both to describe and to interpret the process by which consciousness grasps and perceives the phenomena of the world (Luft 2011). This being the purpose, it is understandable that in a study of the process of the construction of knowledge there should appear a treatise on the physiological complexities that prevent certain subjects from developing the general process of cognition. Therefore, the value of this treatise would not be found in its medical

⁴ Peter Kyslan, from the study of the work of Freud, offers similar results (Kyslan 2023). He shows how the disease, and its medical intervention cannot be kept in a strictly medical (biological) field but requires understanding the totality of the environment as a resource of interaction in which the patient lives and develops. This leads to assuming the context as an aspect of the patient's health and treatment.

contribution, but in the description of the physiological and psychological features that guarantee the construction of meaning.

III. Disease and Symbol: A Philosophical Review

With all this, we can take up again the initial argument and offer a better explanation. We will see that the conclusion cannot be sustained because the general meaning has changed.

Every human being is a symbolic animal (symbolizes). In the development of the paper, it was argued that, according to Cassirer, the concept of symbol is the keynote with which we can define the human being. The main source of argumentation of the neo-Kantian takes as reference the biological results of Jakob von Uexküll whose main idea postulates the perfection of life at any of its levels. Each species develops a neuronal and anatomical system with which to respond to the demands of its surrounding environment; through an effector and receptor system everyone receives stimuli and acts accordingly. To these results, Cassirer incorporates his psychological and phenomenological findings to argue that in the world of the human being we find a symbolic system that allows the human being to construct a world of symbols, the world of culture. With the whole he proposes a new human definition, instead of the classical rational animal he proposes the symbolic animal.

Due to diseases such as aphasia and apraxia, some human beings do not symbolize. As part of his biological arguments, Cassirer elaborates a study on brain lesions and sufferers of aphasia and apraxia. His results show the patients' inability to symbolize in their daily tasks. The main symptom described philosophically is the immediate experience of life. All activity has lost the spiritual sense and vision that allows interpreting new possibilities, constructing metaphorical and analogical meanings. As described by the author, only the concrete acquires meaning and actions must be carried out to be articulated. It is not possible to elaborate an imaginary scenario or to extract potential consequences from a situation that has not occurred. The world, therefore, has lost its symbolic value.

However, this description by Cassirer does not have a medical but a philosophical sense. Unlike the results shown by Kurt Goldstein, the neo-Kantian's description seeks to present phenomenological findings to describe the distance that exists between the immediate world of the sick person and the world of possibilities offered by the symbol. The distinction between one model and the other is important because the effort achieved by the philosopher does not aim to describe human nature, but to manifest the biological value that the human

body maintains with the symbol. The detail and results reflect the loss of an essential function in the human being: the symbol. Given the loss of this dimension, the author only reports the diminution of an ability connatural to the symbolic animal. The contrast of results is found in the reports of Goldstein who in the same way establishes as a pathology the loss of the capacity to symbolize, but as a doctor describes how the organism can find new ways of solution and adaptation to the problem; this could be understood as another feature of the symbolic capacity and the perfection of life.

Therefore, the initial conclusion that stated: patients with diseases such as aphasia and apraxia are not human, although logically drawn, cannot be sustained in the anthropology of body of the author's work. Being a philosophical interest the author's, we will not find a proposal for medical intervention that allows to solve how the rehabilitation of patients with this pathology would be possible, but, as said, analogically an answer can be found in his political criticism of regimes that, by means of violence and oppression, in the same way prevented a healthy organic and symbolic life. This solution, although indirect, points to the philosopher's permanent need to elaborate a critique against the forces that threaten the life of the human being and against the harmonious life of culture.

Thus, it can be affirmed that Cassirer's theory of the symbol not only insists on defining the human being as an animal of symbols, but also culture as a space of interaction and shared responsibilities, where each symbol is called to perform a particular task in order to help those who suffer from an illness or live under oppression and require the community to improve their medical conditions or to overcome the social situations that oppress them.

Wasserman and Wasserman, in this regard, consider that "studies evaluating the level of autonomy in brain damaged patients have shown how apraxia significantly reduces their levels of autonomy in carrying out everyday activities" (Wasserman – Wasserman 2023, 161). This implies that there is a vital need on the part of the patient to rehabilitate himself with the help of various specialists, since his operative and linguistic functions are diminished. In this vital framework, the contribution of a philosophy of symbolic forms, in the sense proposed by Cassirer, is concentrated in three areas Cassirer (2021c, 243 – 328): first, in studying the neurological conditions that generate this condition, and second, in offering lines of interpretation with respect to the treatments and intervention resources developed by neurosciences. The third point involves the delimitation of the tasks and functions that non-scientific

forms can fulfill in the development of a rehabilitation and intervention plan for people with these needs. As Wasserman and Wasserman explain:

Research has demonstrated that many forms of environmental enrichment produce significant changes to components of the network systems. These include improvement in cortical weight and thickness and an increase of dendritic branching and length, the number of dendritic spines, and the size of synapses of some neuronal populations" (Wasserman – Wasserman 2023, 169).

Philosophy, in this framework, has the duty to offer guidelines that allow us to delimit the role that each symbol must play within the cultural framework.

IV. Conclusions

The present article set out to evaluate the logical scopes adduced by the philosophy of the body proposed by Cassirer. Specifically, we sought to discern whether the studies on the *Pathology of Symbolic Consciousness* (developed between 1927 and 1929) could be understood as a resource to establish an ontological and hierarchical difference between patients with some kind of neuronal disease or bodily atrophy that prevents them from developing medically conventional functions.

Following the postulates that the neo-Kantian developed in his work, it was possible to delimit three questions. First, the presentation of language as a natural ability for human beings. Its importance lies in the possibilities and resources for the symbolization of everyday actions. Through the review of case studies of both biographical testimonies of deaf and blind people and aphasic and apraxic patients, Cassirer emphasized that the primary function of language involves the representation of the diverse experiences of human beings with their immediate reality. Unlike other species that manifest resources to communicate and express, in the case of human beings, there is a process of mediation between the experienced reality and the construction of a meaning with which to understand the object. This unity of the material with its meaning is what Cassirer calls symbolic language.

Secondly, symbolic language being an essential characteristic of the human being, in those cases in which this capacity is impaired due to some neuronal lesion that diminishes the exercise and development of this human capacity, as for example, the cases of apraxia and aphasia, Cassirer reports that such a situation implies a fundamental loss in the operative capacities of the subject and, therefore, must be considered as "pathology of symbolic consciousness."

In such cases we are faced with the loss of a determining function that, in any case, must be dealt with by scientific resources such as medicine, psychology or pedagogy, but as far as the author's study is concerned, the limits of his assertions are circumscribed to the phenomenological realm. It can be said that the general question is limited to answering which operative functions are lost in case of a pathology.

Thirdly, however, the philosophical project proposed by Cassirer although not limited to describing the medical conditions of apraxic and aphasic patients, is considered for the elaboration of a critique of culture in which the overall project promotes an intersymbolic dialogue between all modalities to ensure a better development of the community. In this sense, although philosophy cannot influence or promote any type of therapy or clinical intervention, it does, on the other hand, encourage all the possibilities of help and generation of the best conditions of life.

The purpose to which a *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is called is, therefore, to promote an understanding between symbols, and, of course, in cultural terms, so that the description of the pathological conditions that hinder the development of the human being, culturally represents a cultural challenge that must be addressed by integrating various symbols and instrumental resources already developed by mankind over time. In this context, the critique of culture proposed by Cassirer promotes that we recognize the human being in his vital reality to, from there, promote the interrelation of those symbols that could favor a better understanding and solution to the problems that impede the free and healthy development of both the individual and the community.

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